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NEW BUILDING PROJECT OFFICE/OFFICE OF LOGISTICS

ITEM OF INTEREST

On Monday morning, 13 January 1986, a significant event in the construction of the new Headquarters building was achieved. The event was the placement of steel beam number W18x35, the last major piece of structural steel, in the South Tower of the New Building. The complete skeletal framework of the New Building consists of some 14,000,000 pounds of steel. The steelworkers, employed by Williams Enterprises, Falls Church, Virginia, and members of Local No. 5, International Association of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Ironworkers of the United States and Canada, AFL/CIO, celebrated the event with the traditional "topping out" ceremony of hoisting the steel into place with a large American flag and an evergreen tree attached. The flag was the same one used in the New Building Dedication Ceremony on 1 November 1985. This ceremony was recorded by a Printing and Photography Division/OL photographer, and a few selected photos are included for the reader.

While the New Building Project Office (NBPO), OL doesn't do research, we did contact both the American Institute of Steel Construction (in Chicago, Illinois) and the Washington, D. C. chapter of the American Institute of Architects in an attempt to shed some light on the history of "topping-out ceremonies." Two versions of the origins of the ceremony seem to exist. The first version suggests that the ceremony started in China. No one seems to know when in time it started or what significance the Chinese attached to it. The more popular version is that the ceremony started in the Scandinavian countries as a way to thank and honor the Gods for the materials to build the building -- as a "tree worshipping." The American version of the ceremony usually includes both an American flag and an evergreen tree.

In any event, the New Headquarters Building has now been "topped-off" and construction is proceeding apace and on schedule, towards an initial fall 1987 employee occupancy.

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